"WHO IS GOING TO APPLY THIS RIGHT CHRISTIANITY TO OUR LIFE?"

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Being the Last in the Series of

Three Sermons on

"GETTING LIFE AND CHRISTIANITY TOGETHER":

I. The Application of Christianity to Life Presumes Some Christianity to Apply.

II. What is the Right Christianity to Apply to Our Life?

III. Who is Going to Apply this Right Christianity to Our Life?

"WHO IS GOING TO APPLY THIS RIGHT CHRISTIANITY TO OUR LIFE?"

Under the first subject we found that in the end we shall be applying just the Christianity that is present in the lives of people, no more and no less. If we are putting Christianity into the lives of people, then, that application to our practical affairs will be easy. If we are not, then it will be impossible. Some periods are strong in making Christianity to apply. The helps to personal religion then are evident and active. Other periods are less intent on making Christianity and more concerned with applying it. If we were right in our appraisement, the "appliers" of Christianity have gotten ahead of the "makers," and this is why we have such great difficulty in putting Christianity into our social affairs. In both pew and pulpit now the process of making Christianity is unpopular and unattractive. Both ministers and laymen gladly leave the inconspicuous nurture of souls for the public glare of applied Christianity.

Then we asked: "What kind of Christianity are we going to apply?" Among several different uses of the word "Christian" we found three which are used interchangeably, to our great confusion. We found that Christianity for eighty per cent of the people consists

in ten items of belief, not one of which could possibly be applied to life. These may be believed, or not, and the practical effect on the world of believing them, or not, is to divide the world into saved and lost. This historically Christianity believes to be the chief of all its effects upon the world.

Then, when we talk of applying Christianity to life we cannot mean, and never do mean, what eighty per cent of the people understand Christianity to be. Then when we say "apply Christianity" we mean Christianity as used in another sense altogether. It is the Christianity which we mean when we say, "He lives and acts like a Christian." That means one thing, that Christianity is the name of somebody's moral code among all the codes, the name of a body of manners and customs. We found a danger and difficulty which we are now experiencing, that the special code of some Christians will seem so good to them that they may wish to impose it upon all. We saw that much of the application of Christianity to life now is just the effort to apply the standards of life, education, morals and culture of one group of Christians, not only to all Christians but to all citizens.

Then we found that Christianity today is being used to dignify and to further certain schemes of economic and social import which many believe, and we think

with good reason, are subversive of the most thoroughly tested practices by which the world is fed and by which the highest values of our national life were won and can be kept. We found that the very fact that any proposal is called, "applied Christianity," or the bringing in of the Christian order, tends to put us off guard. It tends to make us emotionally receptive to what our common sense ought to reject, and this is its danger. Some things, such as feeding the world and defending one's dearest values, are under the stern laws of God, which we disobey at our peril. Nations have starved to death, and the fruits of many high civilizations have perished, under leading that was emotionally attractive and practically suicidal. Being called "applied Christianity" is not today even prima facie evidence of worth. Each project must be scanned on its merits. It may be provincial morals; it may be a sectional or sectarian state of education and general culture; it may be one side of an economic, or industrial theory dispute; it may be local, or state, or national, or international politics, pure and simple.

Now whether Christianity is right or wrong, it is well to know what it is as a system, a philosophy of life. As far as it is a way of getting at the problems of life, one may know that by the very nature of it he cannot apply Christianity to his neighbor. For example, you

are, as you believe, a Christian. You want your neighbor to be that way too. Whether it is right or wrong as a system, Christianity says that a man has transcendental contacts by which a power is received into that part of him where will, motive, and conscience are. Man is a recipient and a transformer of that power. Christianity is in its essence an inward state. It is only evidenced outwardly in a way of life. Its mark par excellence is not what one does, but how he feels, and what moves him, and why. It is an inward state out of which proceed certain issues of life.

When you wish to apply this Christianity to your neighbor, you may say to him, "As long as you are in this neigborhood, you must act like a Christian." That is not applying Christianity to him. There are other systems which it might be. To apply Christianity to a neighbor one has to get him inwardly to resolve and to want to do what you want him to do, which, let us suppose, is the Christian way. He may not wish to do this, and you may require him to act outwardly as a Christian though he does not feel that way or consent. It may be necessary to do this, but, all we are saying is that this is not Christianity. It might be a military system, for, the very essence of a military system is that one shall act *so,* outwardly, whether he feels that way, or inwardly consents. A military system does not wait, could not

wait, for all to feel within like acting as all the regiment should act. The very essence of a military system is to have men do at once what you want them to do no matter how they feel or what they wish. In this world in its present state it may be necessary to apply government to our neighbor, requiring him to act *so,* whether he wants to or not. That may be necessary, that may be good for the general welfare, but it is not Christianity.

The test is, "Are you requiring of your neighbor what he does not require of himself?" The proper analogy of applying Christianity to your neighbor is a wholly different one. Suppose you have fallen in love with a charming person who has recreated the world for you and made it a new earth and a new heaven. In this mood, born out of this experience, one acts in a certain way, the way lovers act. One acts that way because he is a lover. You want your neighbor to act that way too. You would not say to him, "Act this way whether you feel it or not." He could not do this and to try would be only to make himself ridiculous. The only way you can apply this to him is for him to find someone to love, then, he will act that way, and the two will be acting in like manner but each out of a separate inner experience. The analogy of being in love is not only the analogy *for* Christianity but it *is* Christianity.

You apply Christianity to your neighbor by getting him to want to do as you do because he is in love with the same things. What you require of your neighbor to do, which he does not do himself with the eagerness of a lover, may be a number of things, but it is never Christianity. It may be the application of necessary government, or a military system, or any one of a dozen other systems.

Then, what we do apply to our neighbor is in fact something else. With this conclusion is another. We not only cannot apply Christianity to our neighbor, but also, when he gets it we do not have to apply it to him. You want your neighbor to be a certain kind of person. If he gets this for himself he will be that kind of person. You want to apply Christianity to the family. It can not be done. But if all become Christians of a certain kind, then it will be that kind of family. There are certain ways of living without property and in peace. We are not considering here whether all the world could live this way or not. All we are considering here is that we are trying to apply what is called the Christian attitude toward property and the Christian way of peace with all the world and we do not get on very rapidly. We might observe that the only place this way of holding property and this way of peace ever have been applied is in certain small groups who took this Christian-

ity very seriously and were certain kinds of persons themselves. In some small Christian groups they have lived as many Christians want all the world to live, in peace with the world and without property. Those in these groups were that kind of persons and they could live this way. They did not have to apply it. They were what they were, and their communities were what they were. Being so, it was applied.

There have been through history two ways of getting Christianity into the national life. One says to make Christians and they will do the rest, and you need not bother about applying it. The time when Christians were really a power, was from the time of the Apostles to the time when Constantine came in to help apply it by the aid of the empire. In this period, when Christianity was not worrying about applying it but was kindling the new flame in individual lives, Christianity became something to be reckoned with. You could not see the thing, it was so quiet in its workings. It got hold of people and those people made part of the fabric of the empire. It penetrated into the social life, the commercial life of the whole empire. The penetrating power of Christianity undermined much in the empire, its ways, customs and religions. They got enough people who were *so,* and conditions became different simply because they were so.

Let us skip a few centuries to the time when applied Christianity became the vogue and the policy of the state, the Commonwealth under Cromwell. Puritanism in England began with a purpose of making individuals more Christian. Puritanism began as a true Christian

movement. Puritanism got ambitious. It not only left the whole Christian philosophy of life but it killed itself as a political movement. Puritanism said, "This is too slow, making Christians more Christian. Let us do this in a large way. Let us make people act like Christians whether they feel that way or not." That was Puritanism in power in England, not in Christian power, but just in power, as Caesar was in power, as Constantine was in power.

With what result? With these results: a marked decline in the making of Christians; a secular tyranny was established under the Christian name; a period of unusual wickedness was ushered in and the world came to hate Christianity as a meddlesome and cruel thing. These results flowed from an effort to apply Christianity to life. The reaction in England, to the Puritan application of Christianity to life, was a period of unprecedented looseness in morals and criminal activity, especially among the lower classes. Puritanism in England stands as a warning, and it does not stand alone, of the effects of applying Christianity to life faster than Christians are made to feel that way. The effect of applied Christianity, through the secular arm, was rebellion against religion and decent morals. Its reaction was a period of immorality and crime. We are not here asking why, but are simply recalling the fact.

In the Providence of God for English life, just at the close of this application of Christianity to life by the Puritan regime, there arose another movement. It arose as a national necessity at a time, when, in applying their religion they seemed to have exhausted the supply and

did not have much left. In the Providence of God a movement came which did not talk of applying Christianity, but of making it. This is the movement begun by John Wesley, an Oxford movement in its origin, which came to be called Methodism. According to its convictions, it did make Christians. It made Christians in the very groups and places where Puritanism had failed most to apply Christianity. Dr. Martineau, who was an Englishman, thought that if we would see Christianity as a power, we could not do better than to go to the crowds to whom Wesley and Whitefield preached on the hillsides. There he says we might see the uplifted faces streaked with tears for shame as they had their lives waked within. For results he asks us to go to their homes and "observe the decent taste, the sense of domestic obligation, the care of the children, the desire for instruction, the neighborly kindness, the conscientious self-respect." They made Christians. Did they apply it? It was not necessary. In making them, things became different; different for themselves, different for the country. These people, transformed by Wesley, became at once an asset and not a liability to English life. They got a Christianity within which moved them to a way of life because they loved it, which took the place of a Christianity which they had hated because applied to them.

Christianity is a pretty stiff code, which one demands of himself. It is saved from being burdensome by the very fact that one *does* require it of himself. If one should see a lover do all that he does for his beloved, it would seem bondage. One does say, "I should not

like to be such a slave as that." Indeed the lover and the slave do seem very much alike in what they do, but one is a lover and the other is a slave, and the difference between them is not so much in what they do as in the spirit in which they do it. One does it because he would, and more than he need to, because he is a lover. The other does a little less than is required, and finds that too much, because he is a hireling.

Christianity as a way that men demand of themselves has been, in millions of lives, a beautiful thing. This earth has nothing fairer upon its landscape. Groups of people exacting the Christian way of life of themselves often have been pleasing to behold and profitable to the world. We always admire those Christians, whatever their thought, who *do* exact a way of life of themselves, whether we should care to live that way ourselves or not. We should go to any length necessary to give them protection in being the kind of Christians they require of themselves.

On the whole, Christians exacting their way of life of other people, has been a very ugly thing. It is an ugly thing in history. Applying one's Christianity to others has blackened the human story and made rebel and sullen the face of man. Individuals applying their Christianity to other individuals; families applying their Christianity to their families; communities applying their Christianity to communities; and countries applying their Christianity to all their citizens, this is not pleasant history to recall.

As far as Christianity has been a power, it has been with those who have exacted much of themselves to be

Christians, as they understood it, and have not sought to exact it of others. By common consent there is agreement among the students of Christian bodies that perhaps the Quakers have not only caught the spirit of Christianity best, but also have lived it most thoroughly and courageously themselves. As a force in human affairs none has been more effective in the bringing down of strongholds. As "appliers" of Christianity to life, making the world of practical things feel the power of their presence, no group of Christians, of equal number, have affected the world more, if as much. Whenever intrenched evils or government have run into a body of these Christians they knew they were face to face with a power of an unusual kind that heeded the injunction to stand fast and immovable.

This is interesting and illuminating. The most effective of Christian bodies, in getting life and Christianity together, is the very one which by conviction and by practice does not apply its Christianity to others at all. They live it themselves and are such persons as living it does make them, and they let that do to the world what it can do. By conviction they would not appeal to government to help them apply their Christianity to others. By conviction they would not appeal to government for anything. It is unfortunate that such a type of Christianity languishes when we need it so much. With such a record as this, we are loath to lose it. It is unfortunate that the applied and the political Christianity waxes so strong. We are loath to see it come again. It has no such record in the world that we should desire it, or care to repeat it.

There is no magic cure for deep-seated vices; no way to reach them except where they are. The distinction of Christianity is that it says where they are. There is no alchemy, let us believe, by which we can get golden conduct from leaden instincts. The difficulty always is that we never have enough saints. Saints settle human evils by rendering them homeless. It is the business of government to exact the minimum of its citizens. It is the way of the saint to exact the maximum of himself. A company of saints would make its way by the very contagion of its presence. A world of saints would make the application of Christianity unnecessary, because it would render the evils non-existent.